

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

BJ013

PARTICIPANTS:

Graciela Fernandez Meijides, member of the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights, Secretary of the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons

Enrique Fernandez Meijides, human rights activist, Christian Democratic Party candidate for senator in October 30 elections

Colleen Cupples, First Secretary and Consul of Canada

Neil Brockenshire, Immigration Officer, Canadian Embassy

Canadian psychiatrist

Retired Canadian school teacher

Anne Hamilton, Economic Officer, U.S. Embassy

DATE/PLACE:

February 23, 1984, Colleen Cupples' residence

SUBJECT:

Human Rights Developments in Argentina

DISTRIBUTION:

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On February 23, 1984, Colleen Cupples hosted a dinner to introduce two personal friends visiting from Canada to Graciela and Enrique Fernandez Meijides. The Fernandez Meijides have been very active in the human rights movement since their son disappeared in October 1976. The Canadian visitors questioned them extensively and intelligently on the past and current human rights situation in Argentina. Highlights of the conversation follow.

A delegation from the Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos, including Graciela Fernandez Meijides, had met with President Alfonsín on February 21. As the President is a member of the Asamblea, this was characterized as a "working session". The delegation presented a two-pronged proposal regarding education programs for the children of the disappeared (approximately 7,000 children) and improvements in the mental health system.

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/TPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

( ) Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ( ) In Part ( ) In Full

( ) Classify as ( ) Extend as ( ) Downgrade to

Date

Declassify on Reason

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DECL: OADR

The first proposal calls for the inclusion of the terrorist campaign and Dirty War as subjects in the school curriculum as part of a broad educational effort aimed not only at integrating the victims into a normal school environment, but also educating the other students and the teachers. Special programs, such as holiday camps, would also be established. The second proposal relates to cross-training between public and private mental health institutions. Mr. Fernandez Meijides explained that, in the absence of a willingness of the former government to address the special psychological problems arising during the years of terrorism and violence in Argentina, the victims had turned to private institutions. These institutions had developed an expertise in the area over the years, which should be passed on to the public health sector.

Since President Alfonsín was receptive to the proposals, the group decided to present a formal proposal later during the week.

On the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, Mrs. Fernandez Meijides stated that, although there were differences in working styles, there were as yet no major dissensions in the group. She believed some differences would begin to surface as the group prepared to submit its report to the president. Several of the members might respond to their perception that President Alfonsín would not want to be confronted with the knowledge of the extent of responsibility among the armed forces. The commission believed that the organization of the country into zones with specific chains of command lent itself easily to a determination of responsibility. Mrs. Fernandez Meijides believed that the number of those deeply involved in the anti-subversive units was around 300, and feared that the government's current approach would result in punishment of only a very few. Mrs. Fernandez Meijides was frustrated to hear the president state, in his meeting with the Asamblea, that he had hoped and even expected the military to adopt a 'mea culpa' posture and conduct a self-purge of the higher ranks. She also expressed disappointment with the Military Discipline Code passed by the lower house, noting that Alfonsín's campaign documents had pledged civil justice for those involved in the Dirty War.

Her husband was less condemning of Alfonsín's policies to date. The single most difficult problem facing the country was the economy, and he believed that Alfonsín's strategy thus far had been not to alienate any one sector, in order to gather country-wide support for his economic measures.

Despite the formal timetable, the Commission intended to release its results at the most politically opportune moment, which might come before or after the six-month term is completed. The members were acutely aware of the many difficult problems facing the country, and did not want their findings to be lost on a populace preoccupied with other issues.

With respect to the current situation, the Fernandez Meijides agreed that the situation was better than could have been hoped for under a Peronist government. Nonetheless, fear and paranoia did not disappear with the military regime. They raised several examples to demonstrate that the human rights situation was not as rosy as it would appear on the surface.

A couple exiled in Sweden, who lost eight members of their family during the Dirty War, recently returned to visit their only living relative--a grandmother. In order to return to Sweden, they went to apply for passports at the federal police, and the clerk asked for their old passports. When they explained that they no longer had them because they had fled through Brazil, the clerk began to scream, "Subversives!"

Another example cited was the recent (since the new government assumed power) sale of two properties, the owners of which are known to be dead (Ines Nuñez) or living in exile, through the use of fraudulent identification and powers of attorney. Mrs. Fernandez Meijides believed that the notary public involved in one sale knew that the documentation was falsified, as the sale was completed in two weeks, a remarkably short time for such a transaction in Argentina.

A third example involved a former political prisoner, who received threatening phone calls on his first day home in Bahia Blanca after years of exile in Canada. Ms. Cupples could not understand how this could have happened so soon after his return.

Finally, Mr. Fernandez Meijides had recently submitted two signed articles to Clarín for publication. (The newspaper had printed a long article of his, shortly after the election, in which he advised Montonero leader Firmenich not to return to Argentina.) The editor who received the two articles declined to print them, stating that he did not want to be obliged to have breakfast the next morning in Rio de Janeiro.

Drafted by: ECON:AHamilton:sm/jmr:3/21/84

Cleared by: AMB:EVortiz POL:JAA11itto  
DCM:JABushnell POL:JFKeane

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COMMENT: No serious person suspects that the government or its security forces any longer have a policy of intimidating exiles or journalists who write about human rights cases. However, there are undoubtedly some employees or ex-employees of the security or armed forces who participated in crimes during the "dirty war" who are prepared to use methods such as those mentioned at the bottom of Page 3 to prevent discovery and possible prosecution.

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